



September 15, 2006

Dear Interested Party

During the next several months, the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) will begin to develop a long-term marbled murrelet conservation strategy proposal for forested state trust lands in Western Washington. DNR and USFWS are beginning this process by initiating 'scoping' and requesting public comment under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). "Scoping" is the first phase of a multi-phased process under both of these environmental reviews, when the public is asked to provide input on what should be included in the proposal, and to offer their concerns about possible environmental impacts.

In 1997, DNR signed a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) agreement with the Federal Services (USFWS and NOAA Fisheries) to meet its commitment to conserve habitat under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

When the HCP was signed, managers did not have sufficient information to create a long-term marbled murrelet conservation strategy. Murrelet ecology and use of habitat on DNR-managed forestlands was not well understood. In the absence of this information, an interim conservation strategy was built into the HCP agreement to be implemented while inventories, research and a long-term strategy could be developed. DNR now has enough information to begin. Public input will assist development of alternatives that best conserve and create habitat for the marbled murrelet, while allowing timber harvesting that earns revenue for public schools and other beneficiaries; and protecting other values that forested state trust lands provide to the people of Washington.

As described in the attached SEPA Scoping Notice, DNR is initiating public scoping on September 15 with a public comment period that will run through October 30. In addition, there will be a scoping workshop in Forks, Mt. Vernon, South Bend, and Lacey in late September and early October. Comments will be accepted by mail, e-mail and at the workshops. Details are provided in the attachment.

Throughout this project, information and updates will be found on DNR's website, www.dnr.wa.gov. In early 2007, a summary of public comments and responses will be available there.

DNR and FWS anticipate the SEPA and NEPA process to be completed in 2008. Your feedback and participation in this important process is appreciated. If additional information would be helpful, please contact Andrew Hayes at 360-902-1347.

Sincerely,

Doug Sutherland
Commissioner of Public Lands